

Study Would Be First Step in Process to Draw Additional Tourism, Federal Investment and Jobs to the Region

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand have reintroduced legislation to authorize the National Park Service (NPS) to conduct a study on whether the Hudson River Valley should become a unit of the National Park system. Under such a distinction, the region would benefit from greater national attention, additional federal resources to support and preserve heritage sites, and increased regional tourism, all of which would contribute to job creation and economic growth.

"The Hudson River Valley has inspired artists for centuries, fueled the industrial development of our nation for generations and played a vital role in the American Revolution and founding of our Republic," said Hinchey. "This region deserves to be recognized by the National Park Service for its historical and natural significance and should receive the federal resources and economic benefits that would come with such a recognition. This bill takes the first step by allowing the National Park Service to study if the Valley would be a good fit within the National Parks system. I am so proud to again bring forward this legislation with the support Kirsten Gillibrand in the Senate."

"We're still unlocking the Hudson River Valley's potential," said Senator Gillibrand. "The Hudson River Valley is truly one of America's richest treasures. From the Adirondacks to the busy ports of New York City, the Hudson River fuels our economy, inspires our artists, and provides New Yorkers with miles of adventure and endless recreation. As New York's first Senator from Upstate in nearly 40 years, I will always work to preserve the beauty and tradition of the Hudson River Valley, and this bill takes the first step to getting the national recognition it deserves."

The legislation, entitled The Hudson River Valley Special Resource Study Act, is similar to the bill which passed in the House last year. The Hudson River Valley is already designated as a federal National Heritage Area and state Greenway, but the current federal designation provides only limited funding that is subject to change each budget year. A designation as a National Park unit would provide more consistent and expanded federal support, including National Park Service staff and national attention to the region, all of which would help to boost tourism and preserve and restore the region's historic sites and cultural resources.

In order for the Hudson River Valley to become a unit of the National Park System, a congressionally-authorized NPS study must be conducted. Hinchey and Gillibrand's legislation would authorize such a study for the counties within the borders of current the Hudson River National Heritage Area. Specifically, the area to be studied would include the counties abutting the Hudson River that flows from Rogers Island at Fort Edward in Washington County to the southern boundary of Westchester County.

The bill provides guidelines to ensure that the NPS study recognizes the unique realities of the Hudson River Valley and its differences from more traditional National Park Service units. These guidelines require the NPS to closely examine park unit models, in particular national river and recreation areas, as well as other landscape protection models, that: encompass large areas of non-federal lands within their designated boundaries; foster public and private collaborative arrangements for achieving NPS objectives, and protect and respect the rights of private land owners. No forced land acquisition activities would be permitted.

Following a study, subsequent legislation would be required for a National Park Service unit designation to move forward. In the event that such subsequent legislation were to pass, all activities that are currently permissible under state or local laws would be unaffected because the National Park Service would have no legal authority to overrule state or local laws and policies on non-federal lands, such as those governing hunting and fishing, regardless of whether the region sits within a nationally designated unit of the park system.

Hinchey has long sought greater recognition, protection, and federal and state resources for the Hudson River Valley. As a member of the New York State Assembly, Hinchey authored the legislation that led to the creation of the Hudson River Valley Greenway. In Congress, he authored legislation that led to the designation of the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area, which provides technical assistance to local communities or local managers to assist them in managing natural and historic sites of national importance.